



Do You Need an Exterminator?

A hornet's nest in the eaves, insects swarming around the bathroom drainpipe, strange noises in the walls, a bat in the attic, rat droppings in the basement... Sooner or later, most New Hampshire residents encounter a pest problem in or around their homes.

Experts agree the first step to take when you suspect a pest problem is to identify the pest (or pests) accurately. Many "pests" turn out to be simple nuisances, easily managed by removing attractive food supplies or using exclusion strategies.

If you can see the pest, describe it on paper noting its location, movements and habits. If you can't see a suspected pest, list the signs of its presence: sounds, footprints, droppings, piles of sawdust, nests or nesting materials, as well as any damage to plants, food products, furniture or furnishings, or a building's structure.

Armed with this information, conduct some research. You may want to begin with the toll free Info Line at Cooperative Extension's Family, Home & Garden Education Center:

1-877-398-4769. If your pest is an insect, you can bring an intact specimen to your County Extension Office for identification. In most cases, the Info Line staff or county agricultural educator will offer advice on ways you can control the pest problem and prevent its reoccurrence.

In situations involving human health concerns or an overwhelming infestation, you may need to call in expert help. Licensed pesticide applicators have specialized training and access to stronger, longer-lasting pesticide products than those available to homeowners.

All individuals and pest control companies who perform indoor or outdoor pest control for hire in New Hampshire must hold a current license from the New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets and Food, Division of Pesticide Control.* Licensing requirements include proof of experience, passing a qualifying test and participating in continuing education seminars.

Finding a reliable contractor

Word of mouth is the best way to find a reliable pest control company. Ask your friends and neighbors. If you don't know anyone who's hired a pest control firm recently, go to the Yellow Pages and call three nearby companies. Consider both national firms and smaller local contractors. Hire a firm you feel comfortable with that meet your needs.

Discuss your problem with the company representative, who may inspect your premises before making recommendations.. Ask what techniques and materials they intend to use to solve it. Ask about alternatives to their recommended products and techniques. Learn what procedures you should follow to reduce your exposure to the pesticide (such as vacating the house, emptying the cupboards, removing pets, etc.). The company representative should be able to discuss what you what you can do to prevent or minimize future pest problems.

You may want to research the pesticide products a contractor recommends to control your problem, especially if very ill, very young or elderly individuals, or people suffering asthma or allergies, live in your household. You should certainly raise any such concerns with the pest control company during your negotiations.

For more information, call the National Pesticide Information Center's toll free line: 1-800-858-7378, or consult one of these online sources of pesticide information:

<http://ace.orst.edu/info/extoxnet/ghindex.html> EXTOXNET (Extension Toxicology Network) and Pesticide Action Network (PAN)

<http://npic.orst.edu/> National Pesticide Information Center

http://npic.orst.edu/factsheets/air_gen.pdf An excellent fact sheet on the relationship between pesticides and indoor air quality

Ask specifically about what *you* must do to keep your part of the bargain. (For example, would a termite control guarantee be invalidated if you make structural changes to your home without notifying the pest control company?) Be sure to ask for references from previous customers whose homes or grounds the company treated a problem similar to the one you have.

Research the company's track record. Call the references each company provides. Call the Division of Pesticide Control to ensure the company is licensed. Ask if there have been consumer complaints lodged against the company.

Although New Hampshire requires pesticide contractors to carry comprehensive liability and completed operations insurance coverage, insurance agents report that companies sometimes allow these insurances to lapse. Ask the pest control contractor to provide you with a copy of an up-to-date certificate of insurance.

Make your final decision based on the best combination of price, service, guarantees and references.

Take an active role in developing the contract between you and the pest control company you choose. Be sure to note any safety concerns, such as allergies, age of occupants or how to protect household pets. Specify that these be reflected in the choice of pesticides to be used. Ask the contractor to specify the application rates and locations of all pesticides used in and around your home.

Find out which areas of the house will be treated and what kinds of products will be used. If pesticide sprays will be part of the treatment, remove all bedding and pack children's toys away in bedrooms. In kitchen and pantry areas, remove all open containers of food and all food products stored in paperboard containers and plastic or paper bags. Pesticide products may penetrate paper containers and plastic films.

When the applicator arrives, check to make sure the company license number is displayed on the truck. Finally, evaluate results. If you have reason to believe that something has gone wrong during or after the pesticide application, contact both the company and the Division of Pesticide Control immediately.

What if I'm a renter?

Landlords are responsible for pest control in residential units they rent to the public. However, landlords must comply with NH regulations concerning pesticide application. For further information, contact the Division of Pesticide Control at 271-3550.

Sometimes tenants and landlords disagree about whether a pest is a problem or merely a nuisance. Contact your town health officer and/or the Division of Pesticide Control (271-3550) if you have questions or concerns about a pest problem you cannot resolve with your landlord.

****Trappers, bat exclusion specialists and experts who control nuisance birds are the exception to this general rule.*** If you have skunks living under a porch, porcupines chewing down your hemlock hedge, bears visiting your compost pile or bird feeders or flocks of nuisance birds on your property, contact Wildlife Services in Concord at 223-6832. This branch of the U.S. Department of Agriculture specializes in resolving human-wildlife conflicts. Their wildlife biologists, available to take calls during regular business hours, will offer names of trappers or wildlife removal specialists, or help you devise strategies to discourage nuisance wildlife in and around your home.

Do not attempt to remove a bat or bats that have gotten into your living quarters. A small percentage of bats may carry rabies. Call Wildlife Services (603) 223-6832 for the names of bat removal/exclusion contractors who will remove the bats from your home and prevent them from getting back in. Cooperative Extension advises families who do find a bat in the house to contact their family health care provider to ask about getting rabies prevention shots.

Information provided and fact sheet reviewed by UNH Extension Pesticide Safety Specialist Stan Swier, 03/02

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